



62ND CONFERENCE ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Building Bridges for Success

SHERATON FOUR SEASONS | KOURY CONVENTION CENTER | GREENSBORO, NC

Becoming your child's BEST and most EFFECTIVE Advocate



exceptional children's assistance center

2012

Empowering Families ★ Improving Lives



ecac's major programs

NC PTI:

Parent Training and Information Center funded through IDEA '04

NC HIC:

Family to Family Health Information Center

NC SIP:

NC State Improvement Project with the NC DOE

RPTAC:

Region 2 Technical Assistance Center

ecac is a private non-profit parent organization committed to improving the lives and education of ALL children through a **special emphasis on children with disabilities...**

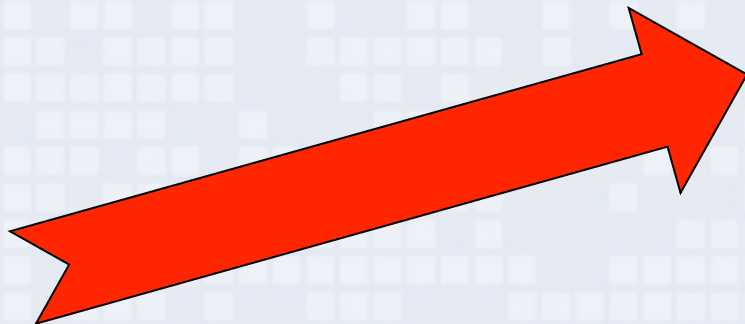
Providing information, education, outreach and support to and for families across the state of NC.



Building Bridges for Success

SHERATON FOUR SEASONS | KOURY CONVENTION CENTER | GREENSBORO, NC

Home to North
Carolina's Parent
Training &
Information Center -
PTI - our services
include...



ecac

exceptional children's
assistance center

North Carolina's Parent Training & Information Center (PTI)

...committed to improving the lives and education of ALL children!

ECAC offers Parents of Children with Special Needs...

1. Individual assistance with educational concerns.
2. Parent education workshops on a variety of topics:
 - a. Parents' Rights and Education Laws (IDEA '04, NCLB, etc.)
 - b. Writing Effective IEPs (Individualized Education Programs)
 - c. Early Childhood Programs and Services (Birth to 3)
 - d. Transition to Preschool and Kindergarten
 - e. Becoming Your Child's Best Advocate
 - f. Positive Behavior Supports
 - g. Transition to Adulthood
 - h. Effective Communication Skills
 - i. Inclusion: Everybody Belongs!
 - j. Literacy for All!
 - k. Other topics as requested
3. Information Packets and referral services
4. Newsletter
5. Lending Library
6. IEP Partners
7. Parent to Parent Support
8. Information and assistance to parent groups



**All services are provided to NC parents
and families at no charge!**

For More Information, contact ecac:

Main Office: (704) 892-1321

Raleigh Office: (866) 740-4135 – toll-free

Western Office: (866) 545-5299 – toll-free

Eastern Office: (800) 782-2094 – toll-free

Parent Information Line: 1-800-962-6817

(Parents only please on the toll-free number)



So, what's so special about the NC PTI?

- ▶ All services are provided at **no cost to families** and low or no cost to professionals!
- ▶ **Statewide Parent-Info-Line** answered by staff who are parents of children with disabilities

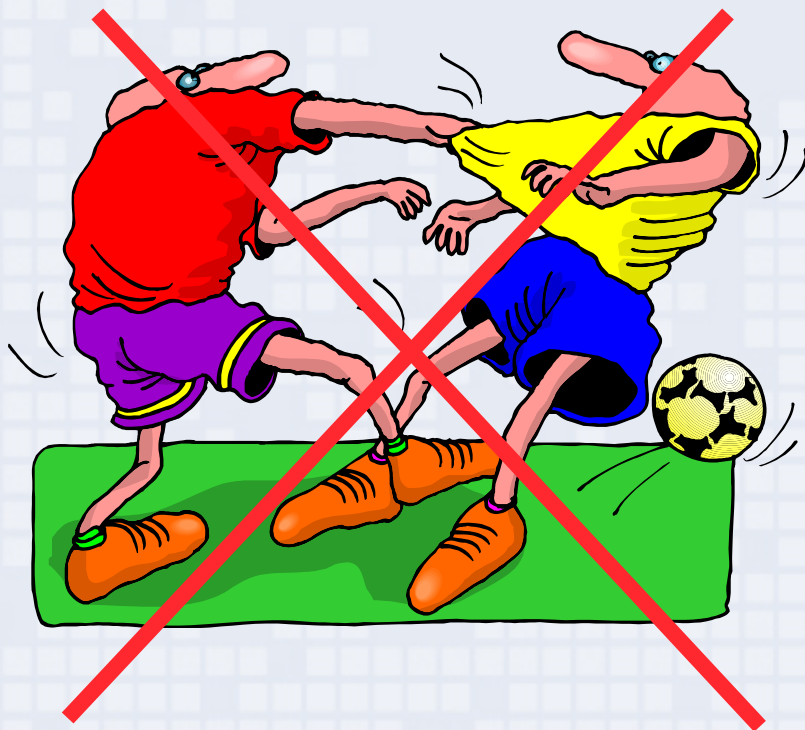




What is Advocacy?

- Advocacy is:
 - “speaking for another person or cause”

An advocate for a child (with or without) a disability can be a parent, a sibling, a relative, a teacher or anyone!



Note: An advocate is NOT an adversary or a bully!



What makes **YOU** your child's **BEST** Advocate?

- You know your child better than anyone
- You've known your child the longest
- You are there for the long haul



and **YOU** care
the **MOST!**



To effectively advocate for your child, you need...

- **Knowledge** of your child's disability and how the disability affects their learning
- **Knowledge** of the laws and your rights
- **Skills** to use your knowledge productively!





So set the stage for Success...

and know how to
handle problems
as they arise.





Effective Advocates...

- Pay attention -
 - Gather and use information to make decisions or requests
- Understand or learn how federal, local and state “systems” operate
- Communicate effectively
 - ask the right questions and listen to the answers





Effective Advocates...

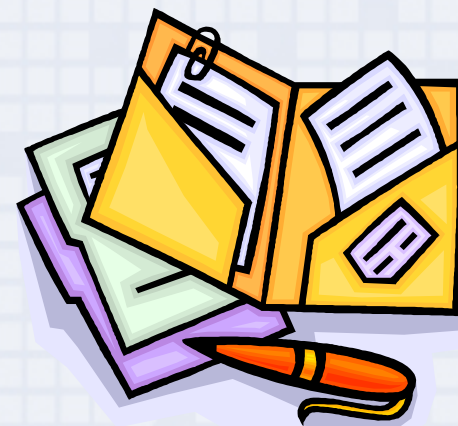
- Identify problems and propose solutions
- Plan ahead and prepare for success
- Keep written records
- Build working relationships!





Pay Attention: Gather, Review and Use Information

- How is your child doing?
 - Is your child happy in school?
 - What are their grades?
 - Is she making progress?
- Have you noticed any changes?
 - Is there reason to be concerned?

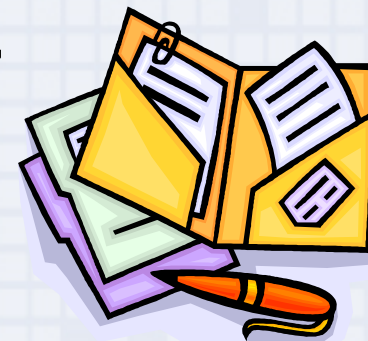


Do you know what is
in your child's
current evaluation,
IEP or 504 Plan?



Pay Attention: Gather, Review and Use Information

- Complete a Positive Student Profile
- Write down any questions & concerns
- Don't forget to talk with your child
 - “What do you need to be able to_____?”
 - “What are your dreams for the future?”
- Review your child's records!
 - Information from last IEP
 - Formal and informal evaluations/assessments
 - Review standardized test results





Many school advocacy issues arise from conflicts about parent and student rights under federal, state, or local laws/policies

- Federal Laws
 - IDEA '04
 - 504
 - FERPA
 - NCLB
 - ADA
- NC Special Education Law:
 - Article 9, GS 115C (2006)
- *Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities*
 - (NC Department of Public Instruction)
 - <http://ec.ncpublicschools.gov>

Know about the laws!



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

“To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for *further education, employment and independent living.*”





The 6 Principles of IDEA

1. Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
2. Appropriate Evaluation
3. IEP (Individualized Education Program)
4. Parent and Student participation
5. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
6. Procedural Safeguards



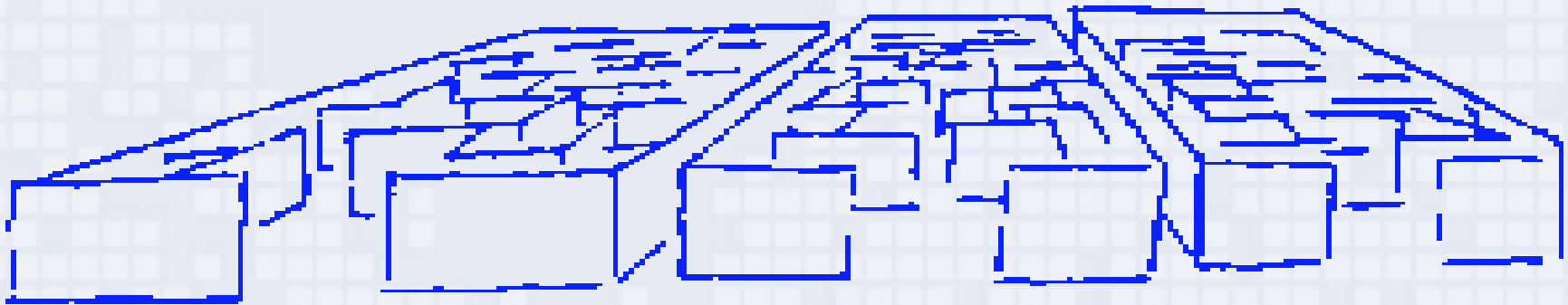
Know where you are in the Special Education Process!

- Referral
- Evaluation
- Eligibility
- IEP
- Placement

Order
must always
be followed!

Learn how the **SYSTEM** Operates

(The school system)

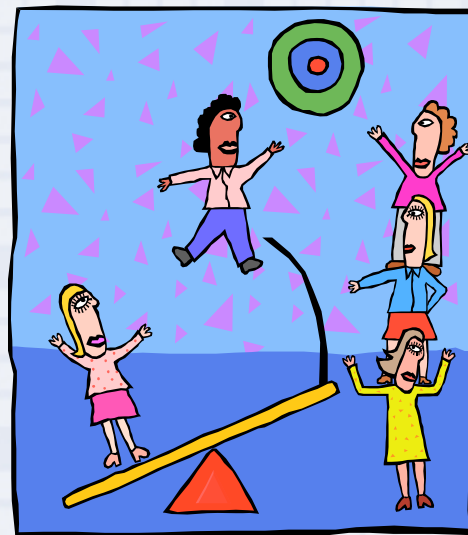


- READ the school handbook!
- Find out who is in charge? (Of what?)
- What is the “chain of command”
 - The goal is to resolve issues at the lowest level first and work your “way up” as you need to



You are and have the right to be a vital part of your child's success... but you can't do it alone

Education, including Special Education is a **team effort** and **everyone** has a part to play. Work **together** in a way that benefits your child!



Tip:

Remember that your behavior can be a help or get in the way of success. **It is up to YOU!**

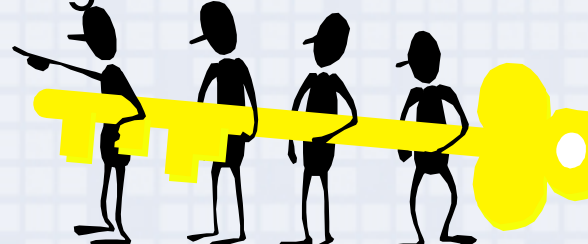


As an equal partner in your child's education . . .



- You must be able to:

- Effectively communicate your views and feelings to the Team and other school personnel:
 - Teachers (regular and special education), administrators, related services professionals, classroom assistants, bus drivers, and anyone else who is working either directly with your child or who is in a decision-making role.





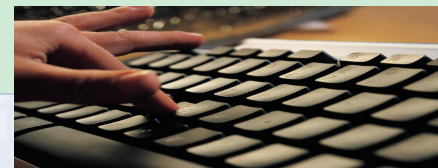
Be ready to communicate effectively

Prioritize and plan ahead!

- Make a list of the issues
- Put them in order of importance
- Know which ones you are willing to let go of if necessary
 - “What’s important for my child is...”
 - “We really need to focus on...”

Have options and ideas for solutions in mind, and offer them for discussion!

- “Here’s a recommendation from (an expert) that has proven successful for other students. I would like us to seriously consider this for *Janie*.”
- Let’s try this piece of assistive technology equipment with *Jamaal* for 8 weeks and see how it goes.”





Talk to your child's teacher(s) (Yes, all of them!)

- Let them know about your child's specific needs
 - Offer copies of IEP or 504 Plan
- Ask them how they wish to be contacted
- Let them know the best way and time to contact you
- Don't wait until you have a problem!
- Thank them!



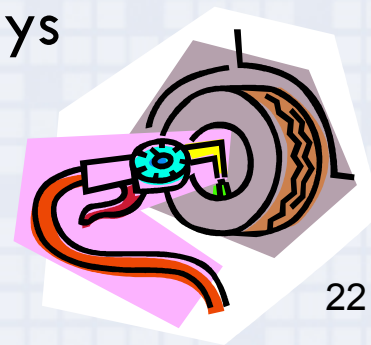
More about
building school
relationships
later!



Watch your emotional pressure gauge

Say what you really want to say, but avoid whining, pleading, screaming and sarcasm!

- Focus positively on your goals
- Keep negative thoughts of past or present issues from creeping into your mind.
- Be positive about succeeding.
- Be assertive - speak up for what you believe in
 - - In direct, honest and appropriate ways

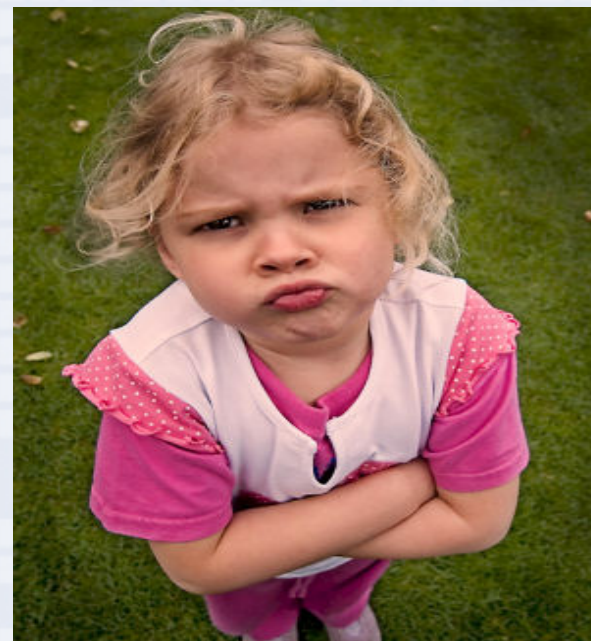




Your mouth's closed but you are still communicating! What's going on?

What messages are you sending with your body language?

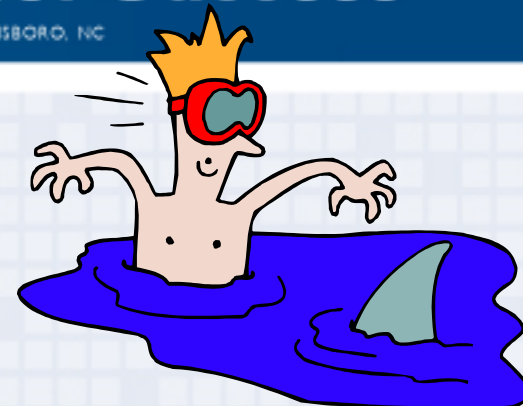
- Interested?
- Bored?
- Angry?
- Distrustful?



“It's hard to shake hands with your arms crossed!”



**Remember, there is
nothing personal !**



There are NO personal issues...the ONLY issue
is the quality of your child's program!

**Effective advocates do not attack people....
they address the problem**



LISTENING is important too!

Expressing our wants,
feelings, thoughts and
opinions clearly and
effectively is only part
of the communication
process needed.





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Let's talk



Steps for success...

- Look for solutions rather than placing blame
- Acknowledge interests and ask the questions that will help identify any underlying barriers
- Stay positive and “future focused”





Tips for Successful Meetings

- Ensure that the time set aside for the meeting is sufficient to address all issues
- Narrow areas of disagreement as much as possible; reserve enough time for big issues of disagreement





Tips for Successful Meetings

- “5 P’ s” -**P**roper **p**reparation **p**revents **p**oor **p**erformance!
- Prioritize the most important issues
- Parent should bring an agenda
- Use the “I” language
- Use your active listening skills
- Refocus the discussion to your child
- Keep requesting revisits of essential issues when necessary





Ask questions!



Questions to Use in Conversations and Meetings about Your Child a.k.a. "Talk Tools"

"It's better to ask some of the questions than to know all the answers."
—James Thurber, American artist and humorist, 1894-1961



The following questions are "talk tools" that ECAC Parent Educators often use with families and professionals. They provide effective ways to request clarification in any situation—at school, at home or in the community and they work well when discussing any topic relating to student performance or learning environments. We use them in conversations about behavior(s), accommodations, modifications, support strategies, classroom situations, teaching methods, or a child's response to any of these. Asking for more information is also a great way to help you maintain your focus and cool!

Instructions for use:

1. Select the questions that best relate to your child's current situation.
2. If needed, adapt the wording so that it feels comfortable for you.
3. Have a copy on hand for phone conversations and meetings.

Question to begin a new conversation:

- Would you be willing to help me think about ways to help my child _____?

Questions for clarification:

- What are you (we) hoping to learn or accomplish by doing this?
- What does that (skill, behavior, activity, etc.) sound like and look like?
- How is this functional/useful for my child?
- How did you come to think that way?
- What evidence (data) do you (we) have to support that?

Questions for problem solving:

- What has already been tried? What hasn't been tried?
 - In what specific circumstances or environment did (will) you try this?
 - How long did (will) you try this?
- What are (were) the results? What has been learned by trying this?
 - Will you review the information (data) with me?
- Why are you trying (did you try) this specific strategy for my child? Is it research-based?
- What will you (we) see and hear that let's us know this is working?
- What are the other options?
- Who else can help us with this?
- What do we need to do next?



- Maintain on-going communication with the school
- Monitor your child's progress and behavior
- Ask questions
- Give people the benefit of the doubt – don't assume bad intentions
- Always try to solve problems at the lowest level

General Advocacy Tips for Parents





Reality Check!



- Some people are just more difficult to work with than others.
- Take the high road - and respectfully, but effectively work around them!



Conflict may happen along the way ...

- When there is confusion or a misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities;
- When effective communication is lacking or breaks down; or
- When there is a genuine fundamental disagreement about services and programs.





Take one step at a time



- Contact appropriate person(s) about the concerns
 - Teacher
 - Related service personnel
 - Transportation officials
 - IEP Team
 - Principal
 - Special Education Program Director
- Be sure concerns or issues are well documented in writing



Chain of Command is Important

- Go to the source
 - If the problem is in the classroom, talk to the classroom teacher before going over his/her head
- If unable to resolve, go to that person's supervisor and so on...
 - Principal, EC Director, Superintendent, etc.
- Ask if the LEA has a formal policy for resolving disagreements





If you get stuck, ask....

stuck?



- Is there enough data to make a good decision?
- What other data or information is needed?
 - Has all available information been shared with the Team **in writing** ? (Diagnosis, educational impacts, changes, reports, etc.)
- Who else should be included in this discussion?
 - Consultants, last year's teacher(s), service providers, central office personnel, etc.



If you get stuck.....

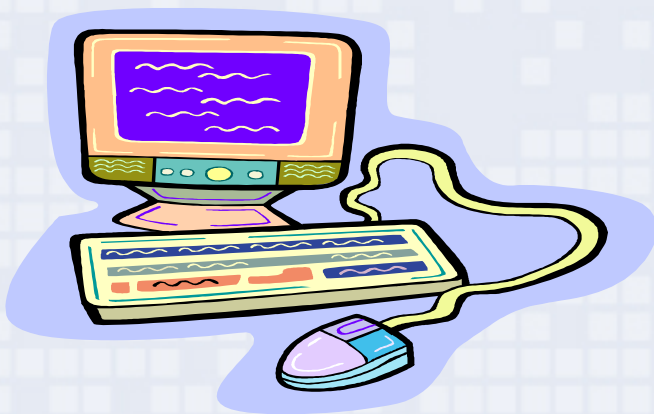
- Ask for a trial period if you would like to try something new that the other IEP Team members are not willing to commit to at this time.
- Try to identify the reasons for the “refusal” or resistance
 - Can the Team address that barrier?
- Make sure discussion is accurately and thoroughly documented in writing
- Remember you can always have another meeting





Make ALL requests in writing

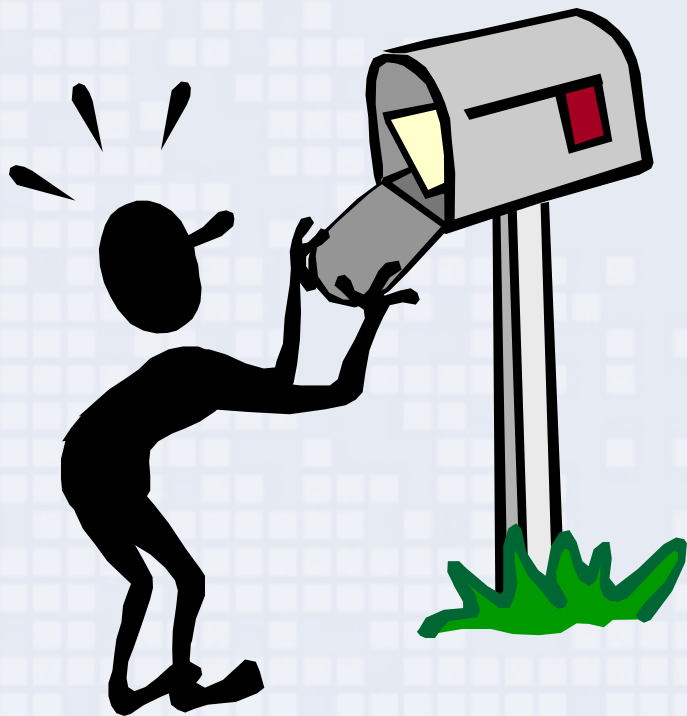
- Short and simple
- Email works too!



**Always keep a
copy for your
records!**



Follow-up conversations or meetings with a note or a letter - *even if it happened in the hallway or on the phone!*



- Thank the teacher or others for their time
- Restate what was discussed and decided, or what you are asking for
- When asking for something, include a time frame for a response back to you and also the best way to reach you.

Don't forget to date the letter and keep a copy for your records!



Keep Records!!!!!!!

Your records of past requests, any data, IEPs, progress notes or report cards, etc. will help you to:

- Stay organized;
- Document progress or needs;
- Support future requests; and
- Effectively advocate for your child!

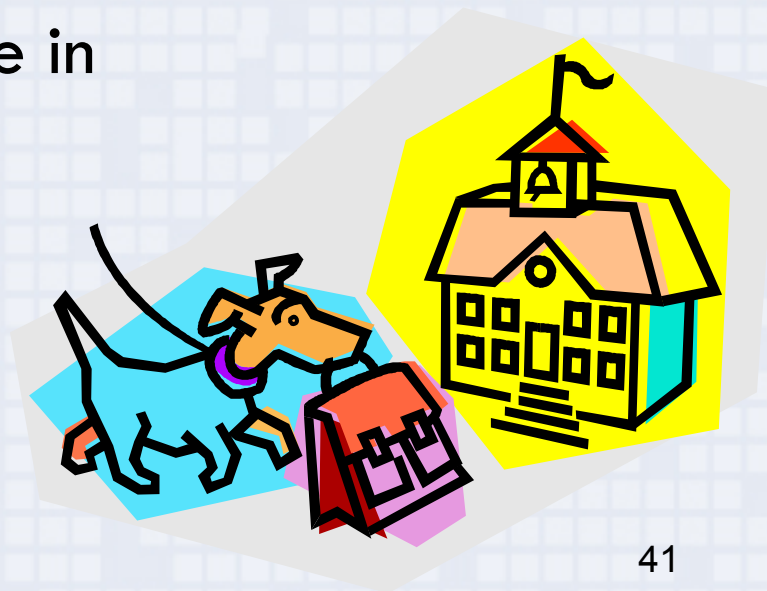


Your requests have a better chance of achieving the desired results when you have the documentation to back you up!



Participate!

- Be active and visible in your child's school
 - Volunteer!
 - Have lunch with your child
- Attend and actively participate in
 - parent / teacher conferences
 - PTA meetings
 - Family nights





Build relationships for the future!

Remember you are only human!

- If you make a mistake or cause offense, say you are sorry!
- Acknowledge what has gone well.
- Always remember to thank people for their efforts, concerns and time.



Know and Use Your Resources!

- Use “trusted” websites – NC DPI, ECAC, LD Online, etc.
- Identify your local resources.
- Know where and how to look up Laws / Policies.
 - Federal, NC Public School Law, NC Policies, Local School Board policies
- And.....

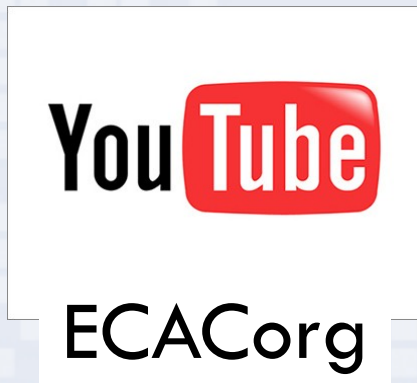


ECAC Parent Educators



CHECK US OUT...WE HERE FOR YOU!

www.ecac-parentcenter.org



ECAC – North
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Parent Center



AskECAC.org
Our blog



Contact us ...

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800-962-6817 *toll free*

704-892-1321

www.ecac-parentcenter.org

ecac@ecacmail.org

Raleigh, Asheville & Wilmington





Sources

- **Communication Skills from:**
 - **Parent's Together**, a joint publication by the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC), Davidson, NC and the former Governor's Advocacy Council, Raleigh, NC
- **CADRE: Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education**
- **Mind Tools** www.mindtools.com
- **From Emotions to Advocacy, Second Edition**
www.wrightslaw.com